

Community / Galas & Events

NIGHT AT THE RANCH

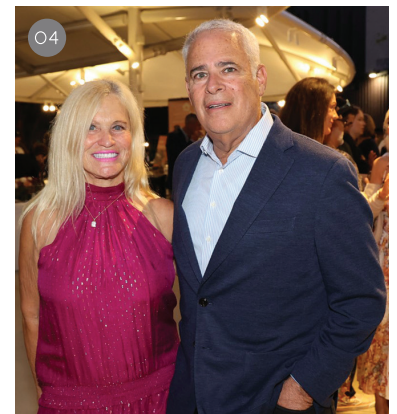
Guests at this annual Boys & Girls Club of Laguna Beach fundraiser were treated to an evening under the stars at The Ranch at Laguna Beach on Sept. 22, which began with a cocktail hour at the sprawling canyon property before transitioning to a fresh, farm-to-table meal. During dinner, Olympic volleyball player Dain Blanton discussed his experience with the Boys & Girls Club and the important role it played in his childhood. Live and silent auctions were also held in support of the center's programming, which serves more than 3,000 per day in the region with a focus on activities that promote social, physical, emotional and intellectual development. The prizes for the live auction included stays at local resorts, including The Ranch and Montage Laguna Beach, along with a trip to Diamond Head in Hawaii, a package from Bianchi winery and more. The sold-out event raised \$129,000, courtesy of more than 200 guests, and culminated with a packed dance floor as attendees enjoyed 1980s hits from cover band Flashback Heart Attack. (bgclagunabeach.org) —Ashley Ryan



1. Dain Blanton 2. Patio dinner setting 3. Leif Hanson, Steve Blue 4. Jared and Sarah Benson

CHEF MASTERS

A special culinary fete took place at the Festival of Arts grounds Sept. 24, with 38 different chefs presenting gourmet dishes in support of local nonprofit Unconditional. With 400 people in attendance, the event raised more than \$1 million to help fund an 8,000-square-foot rescue and adoption center for senior and special needs dogs that is slated to open in Laguna Canyon next year. The fundraiser's chef masters—which included Gregorio Huerta of Hotel Laguna, Lindsay Smith of Nirvana Grille, Peter Moon of Seabutter, Ron Fougeray of Splashes and host chef Leo Bongarra of Terra Laguna Beach—were the talk of the town during a two-hour food and wine reception. Guests were then seated for dessert and a program that featured a raffle for a 52-bottle wine tree crafted by Mona Lee Nesseth of Laguna as well as a drawing for a Duffy boat cruise to The Cannery for a three-course meal; a fund-a-need paddle raise garnered additional funds for Unconditional. The evening concluded with dancing and live music from 1980s cover band Flashback Heart Attack. (chefmasters.org) —A.R.



1. Maria Cadigan, Diane Cuniff 2. Kristin Martin, Julian and Amy Mack 3. Janet Curci, Mikey Lares, Donna Di Bari 4. Susan and Alan Fuerstman 5. Mona Lee Nesseth, George Rozsahegyi 6. Kristin Martin, Mary Murfey 7. Kristi and Bob Jacob



COMEDY NIGHT GALA

Laughter echoed throughout the Festival of Arts grounds Sept. 27 when the Extraordinary Lives Foundation held its annual gala in an effort to raise funds for children's mental health and wellness. The nonprofit's founder and CEO, Mara James, welcomed attendees while also sharing the importance of mental health services for kids; state Treasurer Fiona Ma and Assemblywoman Laurie Davies were also on-site to announce the declaration of the month of September as Children's Emotional Wellness Month. Guests were treated to dinner while watching a comedy show featuring Jennifer Arundale, Eric Schwartz and headliner Caroline Rhea, who is best known for roles in "Sabrina the Teenage Witch" and the animated series "Phineas and Ferb." Aside from the entertainment, silent and live auctions were also held, with over 200 guests raising more than \$220,000 to aid in spreading awareness, education and resources that support ELF's mission to increase emotional development in youth. (elfempowers.org) —A.R.

1. Kathy Lajvardi 2. Darrin Guttman and Barbara Block-Guttman 3. Duan Tran, Alexis Gomez 4. Eric Schwartz, Jennifer Arundale 5. Laurie Davies, Mara James, Fiona Ma

ROMANCE OF THE MISSION

A magical event from the start, Mission San Juan Capistrano's annual Romance of the Mission gala kicked off at the historic property with a cocktail reception in the gardens. Nearly 400 guests enjoyed wine, cocktails and passed hors d'oeuvres while listening to music from a cappella group The Filharmonic. After sunset, guests moved toward the ruins of the Great Stone Church for a concert from female trio Lyric, who sang popular hits of various genres from the 20th and 21st centuries; the mission's executive director, Mechelle Lawrence Adams, also recognized the Walker family and Farmers & Merchants Bank for their assistance in securing Paycheck Protection Program funding during the COVID-19 pandemic to keep the historic mission afloat. Guests were then welcomed to the courtyard for a candlelit dinner, with a meal of short rib and scallops accompanied by opportunity drawings for items like overnight stays at local resorts and a Lugano Diamonds ruby necklace in the shape of a cross. The event concluded with live music under the stars, raising nearly \$280,000 in total to support the mission and its new audio tour, "If These Walls Could Talk: Remembering the Builders." (missionsjc.com) —A.R. ■



1. Gavin Herbert Jr. and Kerry Herbert 2. Matt Harrison, Mechelle Lawrence Adams, Chris and Bill Griffith 3. Henry Walker, Christine Walker-Bowman, Dan Walker 4. James Irvine Swinden, Vicky Carabini 5. Peter and Devin Spenuzza, Peter and Connie Spenuzza, Loreal and Jay Paul Spenuzza 6. Lisa Cvengros Williams and Grant Williams 7. Kyle and Sylvia Franson